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ABSTRACT

Seminar materials are provided from the Bethlehem (Pennsylvania) Area Chamber of Commerce's Literacy Sensitivity Program, which assists managers in identifying workplace basic skills training needs. The document includes the following sections: seminar overview; conducting the seminar--the presentation, the video, the group discussion, and questions and answers; anticipated changes in the workplace; work force literacy survey; business/literacy activities; and Lehigh Valley Literacy Services listing. The seminar overview contains five sections: purpose (upgrading basic skills); target audience (human resource personnel, business owners, supervisors, and service groups); seminar format; facilities and equipment; and materials (handouts and brochures). The following questions comprise the presentation portion: What is the nature and extent of the problem? Why is it important to take action? and How does one recognize or identify basic skills deficiencies in the workplace? The seminar is sufficiently generic to be adapted for use in many situations. (NLA)

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LITERACY SENSITIVITY TRAINING SEMINAR

a project of the
Bethlehem Area Chamber of Commerce

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
June 1991

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The concept, materials and information of this project cannot be credited to a single organization. They are the result of a series of activities conducted by many and then extracted and blended to form a package with a limited purpose in mind. Grateful acknowledgment is given to those who played a major role in shaping this program:

The Pennsylvania Department of Education for funding both the original union counselor training project and the Bethlehem Area Chamber of Commerce's literacy project;

The Pennsylvania AFL-CIO and the **Delaware Literacy Council** for the concept and application of a workplace sensitivity training program;

Edward Rice AFL-CIO Labor Liaison for **United Way of Northampton and Warren Counties** for identifying a local need and arranging for training in the Lehigh Valley;

Helen Patterson, ProJeCt of Easton, for adapting the program and conducting training for the local union counselors;

Barbara Kowitz and Carol Lawfer, ProJeCt of Easton, for modifying the training to a package that could be used with a variety of audiences.

Judy Rance-Roney, Northampton Community College's Adult Literacy Program, for promoting the strength of the Northampton County Literacy Coalition and its WorkTAP activities;

Susan Kraus, The Greif Companies, for conceiving the original idea of literacy sensitivity training for workplace supervisors;

The City of Bethlehem for permitting field testing of the program with its supervisors; and

David and Kathy Davis of the Hellertown-Lower Saucon Chamber of Commerce, for providing the opportunity to present the package at their quarterly meeting.

INTRODUCTION

Business leaders in the Lehigh Valley, like their counterparts nationally, have recognized the need for upgrading the skills of their workforce. Human resource managers, supervisors and small business owners are in key positions to identify training needs. Yet often it is not apparent that basic skills instruction must be a precursor to any other type of training. The Literacy Sensitivity Training Program can assist these front-line managers in identifying the need for basic skills training in their workplace.

The project developed through the efforts of several organizations interested in improving workforce literacy. Initially, the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO, cooperatively with the Harrisburg Region Central Labor Council received a Pennsylvania Department of Education grant to conduct a workplace literacy program. The Delaware County Literacy Council provided the design and conducted training of union counselors. The Northampton and Warren County Labor Councils subsequently became interested in the project and explored the possibilities for adapting it locally. They selected ProJeCt of Easton, an interfaith social action agency, to conduct training because of its experience as a literacy provider and its expertise in tutor training. Fourteen union counselors received six weeks of intensive training in identifying and responding to co-workers' literacy needs. The last two sessions acquainted trainees with local services through presentations by literacy service providers.

The Bethlehem Area Chamber of Commerce had also been actively promoting literacy awareness to its member businesses as a part of a federal/state Adult Basic Education grant. Its Literacy Coordinator additionally served as a regional WorkTAP (Workforce Technical Assistance Program)Consultant for the Pennsylvania Coalition for Literacy. Through these activities it became apparent that while the business community agreed in principle that the workers lacked basic skills, this did not necessarily translate into appropriate sensitivity or identification in the workplace itself.

This identified need, coupled with the success of ProJeCt of Easton's training project, provided the basis for developing the Literacy Sensitivity Training Seminar described herein. The intent was to develop and field test a single session that would provide key company personnel with sufficient background to be sensitive to basic skills needs in the workplace and strategies to address the need.

The seminar was initially field-tested with supervisors from the City of Bethlehem's Parks and Public Works Departments and focused almost exclusively on literacy. Approximately ten supervisors attended a one hour session. Following some

modifications to the content and structure, the seminar was again field-tested with a group of approximately thirty members of the Hellertown-Lower Saucon Chamber of Commerce. These individuals represented small, medium and large businesses.

The seminar is sufficiently generic to be adapted for use in many situations. It provides the basic framework for training and should be strengthened with local information and resources.

SEMINAR OVERVIEW

Purpose: To acquaint key business managers and community members with the 1) need for upgrading basic skills in the workforce; 2) the effect of deficiencies on company performance; and 3) the methods and services to address the problem.

Target Audience: Human resource personnel, business owners and company supervisors were the primary audience for the seminar. However, the orientation nature of this training can be used equally well with service groups (e.g. Rotary Clubs, Chamber of Commerce committee members and other organizations that might wish to become better acquainted with workforce training needs).

Seminar Format: The entire seminar should last not more than an hour. It, therefore, can be an effective and time-sensitive program for meetings that occur in the normal part of a business day. The format calls for a presentation of fifteen minutes; viewing of a video for fifteen minutes; small group discussion for fifteen minutes and the final quarter-hour devoted to questions and answers.

Facilities and Equipment: Audience size will dictate room capacity. The program is appropriate for as few as five or as many as one hundred. Preferably, the audience will be seated at tables of not more than eight individuals to simplify discussion. A videocassette recorder with VHS format and a TV monitor should be arranged in advance.

Materials: Several handouts are recommended for use with the audience. Forms supplied in this package include three handouts to be used during the presentation. Brochures or other printed information from local adult education programs should be obtained in sufficient quantities so that attendees will be able to call on these resources as needed.
In addition, the brochure "Functional Illiteracy Hurts Business" is available at limited cost from the Business Council for Effective Literacy, 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10020, (212) 512-2415.

CONDUCTING THE SEMINAR

PART I: The Presentation (15 minutes)

The following questions and information comprise this portion of the seminar.

What is the nature and extent of the problem?

Pennsylvania and the nation are undergoing a significant change in their economic base and the makeup of the labor force. Much of the current workforce is oriented to unskilled jobs in heavy industry. They must be retrained in technical and service sector skills. Many cannot currently be retrained because they lack the necessary basic (reading, writing, math) skills to participate in training.

Several trends are influencing this need. First, there is an increase in service and technology jobs. By 1995 sixteen million new jobs will replace obsolete jobs. Nine out of ten new jobs will be technology or service related. Most of the new jobs will require a higher level of basic skills than current workers possess. Table 1, following this page, can be used to further document the anticipated changes in the workplace.

Second, there is a significant change in the workforce itself. Known as the "baby bust," the last few decades have resulted in a declining pool of young workers. Furthermore, the largest portion of new entrants into the workforce are women and minorities - traditionally the least educated. The net effect is a large group of older workers who must be retrained and younger entry level workers whose skills must be upgraded.

Why is it important to take action?

A company is dependent upon skilled workers Without these, its bottom line is affected. It can mean:

-loss of productivity
-high accident rates
-destruction or improper use of equipment
-low quality control of product
-high error rates
-dissatisfied customers (one dissatisfied customer will tell ten others)

The broad effect on the business community is to create inefficiency and poor service; increased health and disability

expenses; inability to fill employment slots with qualified candidates; and ineffective customer relations. The handout "Anticipated Changes in the Workplace" may be used at this point for further illustration and to personalize the issue.

Beyond the financial impact on businesses, there is the larger responsibility toward the community, the state and the nation.

How does one recognize or identity basic skills deficiencies in the workplace?

It is important to recognize, first, that basic skills deficiencies may be found at any level of business, personal and social endeavors. We are all functionally incompetent at some level. Furthermore, the rapidly changing nature of our world has resulted in a universal need for continuing education. Education, in general, must be ongoing; and in particular, must be targeted to the emerging requirements and objectives of our lives.

Point out that the audience may have noticed some of the results of basic skills deficiencies in their own organization. Use the handout "Workforce Literacy Survey" to highlight typical symptoms.

But let's return to that group of individuals who have limited or no ability to decode the written word, are unable to perform basic computations or produce acceptable written documents. Each is unique. Each has his or her own reason for not learning to read and write and each has a moving and compelling reason for courageously returning to learn now. More often than not, they are hard-working employed individuals. None blames any but him or herself for the lack of skills ("I just wasn't interested in learning . . . I didn't realize how important it was.") Many, while holding close ties to home and family, have not had the courage to admit the problem to family or friends. These talented and resourceful individuals deserve attention and respect.

Most individuals lacking basic skills are adept at compensating for this lack. They may have developed almost photographic memories, simply because they rely on them more than others. The majority will avoid situations that might show incompetence. Deceptive mechanisms may be employed to hide deficiencies. Some people will have an unwillingness to read information or do paperwork in your presence. Others will use the telephone consistently, after receiving job orders and written information. (The telephone is used to call a literaate person to decipher the written information.) Comments such as "I forgot my glasses," or "I'll get back to you on this" may be indicators of functional illiteracy.

PART II - THE VIDEO

Several videos are recommended to include at this point in the presentation. Two last less than fifteen minutes; the third approximately thirty. Each may be used in its entirety or shortened to include a specific segment. The thrust of each video is slightly different. One should be selected with the nature of the audience and the general goal in mind.

"Bluffing It II" - This is a 13 minute condensed version of the ABC/PBS drama "Bluffing It" starring Dennis Weaver. It depicts the personal story of an employee unable to advance because of illiteracy. Although no longer available for purchase it can be obtained on loan from: AdvancE, PDE Resource Center, Pennsylvania Department of Education, 333 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333.

"Literacy in the Workplace" - A 14 minute video highlighting workforce needs in the Appalachian region and solutions provided by companies and providers. It is available from the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Penn State University, 248 Calder Way, Suite 307, University Park, PA 16801.

"Success Ahead" - A more in-depth look at three Pennsylvania companies who have formed partnerships with educational providers to offer basic skills training in the workplace. Also available from the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy (above).

PART III - THE GROUP DISCUSSION

After viewing the video, use some examples to highlight the consequences of illiteracy in the workplace:

*An insurance company employee paid a policyholder $2,200 on a $100 claim instead of the $22.00 authorized because she didn't understand decimals.

*A hotel was unable to find a guest's registration because the registration clerk misspelled the name.

*A transport company delivered its cargo to the wrong place because the driver was unable to read the directions or instructions.

*A steel-mill worker who couldn't read cost his company more than $1 million when he ordered the wrong spare parts from a warehouse.

*An illiterate mechanic cost the Navy $250,000 in damaged equipment because he couldn't read the repair manual.

*A train motorman, on trial for negligence in a fatal accident, admitted he had trouble reading his service manual as did many of his co-workers.

*A bank with approximately fifty regional branches found it necessary to add two weeks to its teller-training program simply because these newly-hired individuals did not have adequate basic skills.

Following these examples, ask the group to conduct a small discussion among themselves to elicit personal experiences with basic skills deficiencies. Ask them to limit their discussion to approximately five minutes and to elect a leader to report to the group at large. Then allow the another five minutes for group feedback.

PART IV - QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Begin this final part of the program with the following question and answers. The question may be rhetorical with answers supplied by the presenter or the question may be addressed to the group for ideas. In either case, it is important to insure that most of the answers are covered. The final handout "Business Literacy Acitivities" may be used at this time.

What can a business or organization do?

1. Try not to seem too surprised when discovering a deficiency. The person is not a criminal, but one who missed important lessons in school and has had to compensate all these years. This is not the sign of a poor worker, but simply the lack of a learned skill.

2. Try to assure the employee that he/she is valued. Point out that the company values him or that she is not out of a job.

3. Maintain confidentiality of this information. Most employees do not wish their coworkers or supervisors to be aware of their skill deficiencies or need for training.

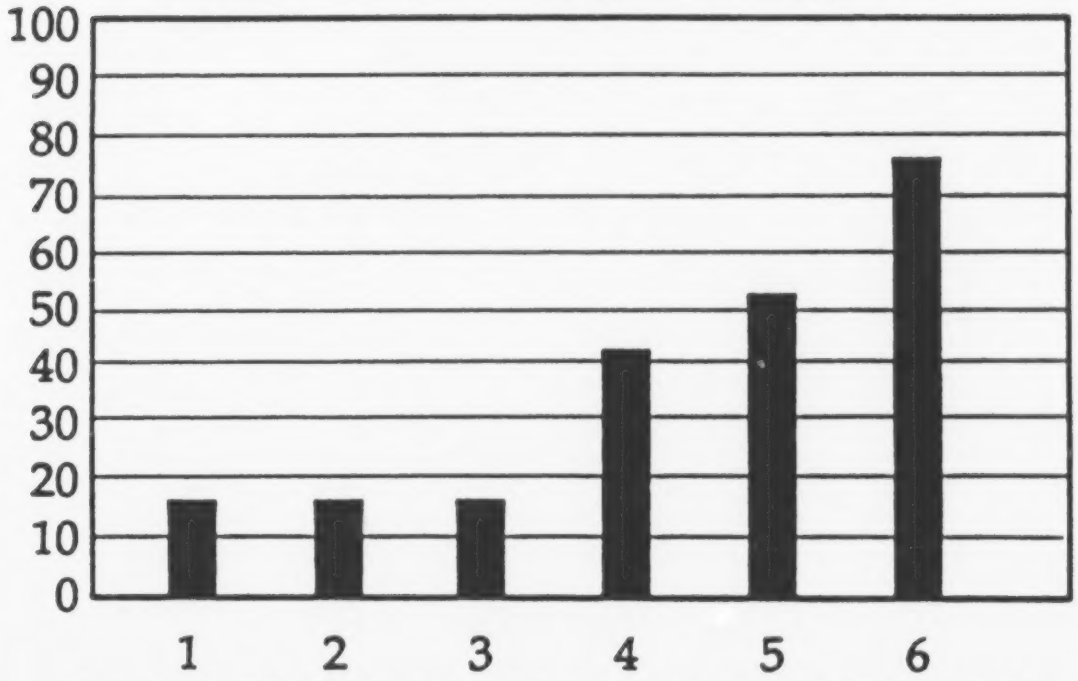
4. Help employees find assistance. If job performance is not affected, they may be referred to an adult basic education program. If it does affect job performance, check with in-house training staff or consult a literacy professional. For isolated problems, a one-on-one tutor is ideal. For wider-spread difficulties, classes can be offered on- or off-site using local adult educators. The latter also may help establish an in-house volunteer tutoring program. Most adult education programs should also be able to design and tailor job-specific training. Often their services are grant-funded so there would be little or no cost to the company.

5. Simplify all internal documents. Be aware that many employees may not have sufficient levels of comprehension and retention to understand work-related documents (i.e. benefits information, technical and training manuals, job postings, hazards labeling and general company information). Oral announcements and explanations might be used in some situations. Oral feedback from recipients can verify understanding. Printed information should be checked for readability levels. New software such as "Grammatik" or adult education professionals can provide an analysis of information.

6. Become familiar with local adult basic and continuing education programs. Acquaint employees with community or company resources for improving their skills. Make sure that all are aware of how to access GED (alternative high school diploma) instruction and testing. The form "Literacy Services in the Lehigh Valley" is an example of a simple flyer which can be supplied to organizations desiring resource information.

7. As a company, value and support skill improvement. It can be made a prerequisite for employment. Current employees who participate in skill improvement programs could be eligible for special recognition or promotion. Financial incentives such as bonuses or reimbursement of educational expenses can be powerful motivators.

TABLE 1 Anticipated Changes in the Workplace



KEY: CHANGES

1-Implications of safety regulations

2-Increased demands of training

3-Previously routine jobs becoming more complex

4-Increased sophistication of machinery

5-Increased dependence on written communication

6-Introduction of computers

From *Basic Skills Needs in Business & Industry*, Literacy 85, May 1985, p. 69.

WORKFORCE LITERACY SURVEY

Some of the results of employee basic skills deficiencies are listed below. Does your company experience any of these problems? Check those that apply.

------ decreased productivity and/or customer service

------ lack of employee promotability

------ increased difficulty in hiring qualified workers

------ inability or slowness to master new technology

------ increased length and/or cost of training

------ difficulty in math-related activities (making change, balancing cash drawers, graphs, percentages, etc.)

------ difficulty understanding/following written instructions or preparing written materials (reports, forms, memos, messages)

------ inability to speak/read basic English

If you would like more information, or help in addressing the problem, please complete the following:

Name _____ **Position** _____

Company _____ **Telephone** _____

BUSINESS/LITERACY ACTIVITIES

_____ 1. Distribute/post literature on literacy programs.

_____ 2. Refer employees to existing literacy/basic skills programs.

_____ 3. Become a literacy tutor (1-2 hours per week at your convenience).

_____ 4. Arrange to hold a basic skills program at your site, using one of the free providers already available.

_____ 5. Become an active member of the Northampton County Literacy Coalition.

_____ 6. Make your business site available to literacy programs for site tours and job explanations.

_____ 7. Fund GED testing fees ($25/person) for employees or worthy adult students.

_____ 8. Speak to a group of adult students about your company/industry (kinds of jobs, basic skills needs, future trends).

_____ 9. Conduct an in-house assessment to determine your training needs with the assistance of a local provider.

_____10. Provide released time for employees to attend training.

_____11. Participate in a research project to find out the basic skills needed for your business/industry.

_____12. Arrange for a literacy/basic skills speaker for your employees.

_____13. Offer your employees an incentive to improve their basic skills.

_____14. Donate services or materials to literacy programs (printing, graphic design, etc.).

_____15. For your upcoming position openings, target and perhaps hire a graduate of one of the local GED or literacy programs.

Name _____ Telephone _____

Organization _____

Address _____

LEHIGH VALLEY LITERACY SERVICES

PROVIDER		English as a Second Language	Literacy/Numeracy (beginning reading, math skills)	Adult Basic Education (intermediate reading, writing, math skills)	GED (secondary level skills, diploma preparation)	Work-site Classes	Provider-site Classes	Tutors	Tutor Training	Computer-aided Instruction	Speakers	Job Task Analysis	Employee Skill Assessment	Literacy Sensitivity Training (for managers)	GED Testing	Career/Job Assistance
Allentown Literacy Council	435-0680	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆		
Allentown School District	820-2352	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆								◆	
Bethlehem Area Public Library	867-7852	◆	◆					◆	◆	◆						◆
Bethlehem Area School District	691-7200	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆		◆						◆	
Bethlehem Area Vo-Tech School	866-8013				◆					◆						
Catasauqua School District	264-0506														◆	
Easton Area School District	250-2496	◆		◆	◆		◆								◆	
Lehigh County Community College	776-1998	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆			◆
Lehigh County Vo- Tech School	799-1322				◆		◆								◆	
Nazareth Area School District	759-3350	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆	◆	◆							
Northampton Community College	861-5427	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆			◆
Pen Argyl Area School District	588-2449	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆				
Private Industry Council	437-5627	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆			◆	◆		◆			◆
ProJeCt of Easton	258-4361	◆	◆	◆			◆	◆	◆	◆	◆			◆		